

San Antonio Missions NHP -- Pre-visit Activity #2 - High  
Recommended

**TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT**

Subject: Social Science, Citizenship  
Grade: Grade 4 and above  
Time: One hour (can be done in two 30-minute segments)  
Goal: To instill an appreciation of the role the NPS plays as caretaker to American history, culture, and environment.  
Vocabulary: National Park Service, stewardship, preservation, heritage, cultural

**Background:**

In 1978, the Congress of the United States determined that the missions of San Antonio were cultural treasures and therefore deserved to be protected within the National Park Service (NPS). San Antonio Missions NHP was established in order to provide for the preservation and interpretation of Concepción, San José, San Juan, and Espada, including historically associated features and structures, **for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations of Americans.** The missions are historically and architecturally significant remnants of the Spanish quest for lands and Christian converts in the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> century Americas.

The NPS manages over 380 sites, all unique and all vital to the heritage of Americans. These parks belong to the citizens of this nation. Some of these sites were preserved because of their natural beauty or uniqueness. Big Bend NP, Padre Island NS, Grand Canyon NP, Yellowstone NP, Yosemite NP, and Everglades NP are just some natural areas. Other of the NPS sites are preserved for their historical significance. There are battlefields from almost every war the USA has fought – Fort Sumter, Gettysburg, Palo Alto, Little Bighorn, US Arizona, and the Vietnam Memorial are a few. A home or site for most of the US Presidents is within the system – Washington, Lincoln, Roosevelt, Taft, Johnson. Significant events in American and world history are preserved – Wright Brothers, Minute Man, Independence, and Manzanar. Native American cultures are represented – Ocmulgee, Poverty Point, Casa Grande, Hovenweep, Nez Perce, and Pu'uhonua o Honaunau. People and their contributions to American life are not forgotten – Roger Williams, Carl

Sandburg, Maggie Walker, Martin Luther King, Clara Barton, and Thomas Edison.

The inevitable disappearance of material links with the past must be understood on an individual, personal level first. When children have been led to see how fleeting and fragile the physical evidence of their own Past is, they are better able to understand the fragility of our shared heritage. Children must be led to know how they will feel about past things when they are older. They must be challenged to identify what they value in the Present; that understanding and preservation of the Past can help maintain for them in the Future.

Practically speaking, children have no Past except their own personal one, and this one they sequence whimsically, arbitrarily, subjectively. The complex, adult Past, particularly as it is perceived by historians, prehistorians, preservationists, and teachers has no intrinsic worth to children. It is NOT important.

The notion of Past Time must be introduced to children on a personal level first, therefore, and then be expanded into the framework of shared cultural experiences. If this linkage is not well established from the outset, then later attempts to put a value on the adult Past will have no practical effect.

Procedure:

1. Ask your students to think about, identify, and write down two objects (not animals or persons). One object should be something that is important to them, or treasured by them, or dear to them now, in the Present. The other object should be one that was important, treasured, or dear to them five years ago. Seal their written answers in an envelope. Their answers will be part of the conclusion of this unit.
2. Read the quotation below:

*If you lose your history, you lose your memory;  
If you lose your memory, you lose your mind.*

Maulana Karenga, African historian

What does Karenga mean? Is it knowing about your past? Why or why not? What have you learned from your past? Is your past important to you?

3. Read the quotation below:

*A country with no regard for its past will have little worth remembering in the future.*

Abraham Lincoln, US  
President

What do you think Lincoln meant? Do you agree with Lincoln? Why or why not?

4. Discuss with your students the following: What items can you think to throw away or remove from your home so that no one will know that you had ever been there? List on the blackboard. How does it make you feel to have “disappeared”?
5. Have each student to list three things that belong to them that they would like to keep the rest of their lives, if they could only keep those three things. What would they do to preserve them or take care of these items? Next remind students that before beginning this unit they wrote down one object that is important to them now and one object that was important to them five years ago. How do their objects compare? Would anyone change either of their first two items?
6. Discuss the role of the National Park Service in the preservation and protection of America’s shared heritage. Use San Antonio Missions National Historical Park as the example.

(Much of the above information is from “Our Disappearing Heritage: Why is the Past Important?” by Charles Blanchard, Florida Heritage Education Program, 1995)